

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 704
By Fitzhugh

A RESOLUTION to honor Thomas Howard Bettis for his service in World War II as part of the 2003 Loudon County Memorial Day Program.

WHEREAS, since the birth of our great nation, hundreds of thousands of brave American men and women have served their country in the armed forces, and many continue this legacy of service today, defending the most inviolate principles of human freedom and democracy; and

WHEREAS, it is most appropriate that we should honor those courageous men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives to preserve the blessed freedoms we enjoy today; over one million Americans throughout our country's history have died in the service of this nation; and

WHEREAS, from the battles of the Rhineland in Europe, to the many battles of the Korean Peninsula, to the firefights and skirmishes of Southeast Asia, and to the air strikes and bombing missions of the Persian Gulf, our armed forces have unselfishly paid the price of freedom for their friends, families, and for all of us as Tennesseans and Americans; and

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WHEREAS, it is the privilege of this General Assembly to pause in its deliberations to honor the brave sons of Loudon County who forfeited their liberty and, in many instances, their lives and to further recognize those who endured personal hardships and imprisonment at the hands of our enemies so that we might continue to enjoy the many bounties of democracy and the American way of life; and

WHEREAS, in this same spirit, Loudon County will be holding a 2003 Veterans' Memorial Ceremony at which time Thomas Howard Bettis, a World War II veteran; Ralph J. Shope, a World War II and Korean War veteran; Charles A. Bettis, a Vietnam War veteran; and Joe D. Mourfield, a Desert Shield and Desert Storm veteran will be specially recognized and honored as representatives of the veterans of each of these four wars; and

WHEREAS, this fitting observance provides the citizens of Loudon County with the opportunity to pay tribute to the veterans from their community who have well served this country; it is incumbent upon the members of this legislative body to recognize this important county observance and these four individuals; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Howard Bettis served three and one-half years during World War II in the 43rd Tank Battalion, Company A, as a Staff Sergeant and as a tank commander in the European Theater, participating in several battles where the Allied Forces pushed forward from Normandy to reclaim Europe from the Nazi Germany Forces, including the horrific battles of the Rhineland. Staff Sergeant Bettis can recall several occasions of heated tank-to-tank combat during which his tank was able to help clear out enemy opponents from the famed Maginot Line; and

WHEREAS, one January afternoon in 1944, Thomas Howard Bettis and his group of tanks moved into the outskirts of a town in Alsace-Lorraine, without the support of infantry which was delayed in its arrival, so that the tanks had to wait to attack, and overnight Bettis and his fellow American tank crews became surrounded by enemy forces, including artillery mounted on railroad cars that were brought into range under the cover of darkness while being screened by

the trees along the railroad; at daybreak on January 17th, a surprise enemy attack brought rounds of 88 artillery fire upon the American tanks' position; the Americans returned fire in defense, but had to withdraw into town on foot due to the overwhelming concealed artillery fire, where the able American combatants, including Staff Sergeant Bettis, attempted to defend themselves with small arms before being surrounded by superior enemy forces later that afternoon and becoming prisoners of war; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Howard Bettis and his fellow prisoners were placed on barges and transported to Nuremberg where they were held in prison for months before being marched on foot deeper into the heart of Germany to be confined in even more extreme conditions of winter cold and starvation, and along the march, Bettis recalls conversations with one of his Nazi guards who spoke to him in excellent English, having attended school for five years in New York; along the march, Bettis and others were held prisoner in a barn where he crept out at night to raid a garden of left-over potatoes to feed himself and his hungry comrades, and while spending over four months in various prisoner of war camps and concentration camps, Bettis reluctantly recalls bitter cold, illness, and starvation so acute that he had dreams and visions of eating out of the slop bucket his mother used to feed the hogs back on the family farm in East Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Howard Bettis and his fellow prisoners of war, a group which included Americans, British, Russians, and other troops, were eventually liberated by the forces of U.S. General George S. Patton near the conclusion of the war, and Bettis recalls being nearly exhausted from starvation and foraging for food in the nearby town immediately upon his release; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Howard Bettis, who received the American Theater Service Medal, the European African Middle Eastern Service Medal, a Good Conduct Medal, and the Victory Medal, was eventually returned across the Atlantic to New York City and made his way home to Loudon, where he met his father in town just down from the train station and was not even

recognized by his father because his appearance had changed so much during his three and one-half years of service and his confinement in the Nazi prisoner of war camp; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Howard Bettis has served the Loudon County community as a member of Cedar Fork Baptist Church and an employee at various Oak Ridge federal facilities, from which he retired in 1981; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Howard Bettis enjoys the love of his wife, Dorothy Cannon Bettis, whom he married in 1945; and the love of his son, Phillip Bettis; his daughter, Rebecca Bettis Kirkland, and her husband, William Kirkland; his son, Stephen Bettis; his daughter, Martha Bettis Thompson, and her husband, Michael Thompson; his grandchildren, Kelly Jane Kirkland, Kristi Kirkland Ingram, and her husband, Patrick Ingram, Misti Bettis Newman, and her husband, Mike Newman, Julie Thompson Stockton, and her husband, Josh Stockton, Jake Thompson, and Kaylyn Thompson; two great-grandchildren, Hannah and Delaney Ingram; as well as many other family members, friends, and neighbors; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we recognize Thomas Howard Bettis for his accomplishments as a veteran, a family man, and a community leader.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we encourage all Loudon County citizens to join with us in this worthy Memorial Day observance, to acknowledge the sacrifices and heroism of Thomas Howard Bettis and the other veterans of the World War II and advocate that local ceremonies and services be held across the country in memory of all deceased veterans and in appreciation and admiration for their local veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.